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Understanding Secondary Students' Reading and Writing Records: A Study of Curricula in Literacy Achievement

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Understanding Secondary Students' Reading and Writing Records:

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Action Research Project (EDC 587)

Abstract: In accordance with the new federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states, districts, schools, and educators must set and implement a plan that ensures all students are academically proficient in the areas of reading, math and science by the year 2014. According to The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the "national average reading scores of 4^{th} and 8^{th} graders have varied little over time, though both were 2 points higher in 2005 than in 1992. However, the scores of 12^{th} graders declined 6 points during this period" (Livingston, 2007, p.6). As part of this research, I sought to determine what strategies teachers are using in upper grade reading and writing instruction and what instructional strategies correlate with high state student assessment results. My research question was: Which curricular approaches are found in schools with high student achievement scores from state and federal standardized test results at the secondary level?

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Introduction and Origin of the Study

This Action Research Project focuses on literacy achievement strategies for students in grades 5-12. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), there are three primary approaches used to improve skill mastery in reading and writing curricula in the classroom: 1) Phonics based instruction; 2) Whole language instruction; and 3) Cooperative learning group activities. In this study, I sought to determine which research practices were found in high achieving schools.

It is widely believed that phonics-based reading instruction (or Basal instruction) is the most effective approach when introduced early in a child's education, usually before and up to grade four (Routman, 1997). Subsequently, "whole language" instruction typically follows phonics based instruction in schools and becomes the primary approach to literacy achievement in the upper grades 5-12 (Jeynes, 2000). A third approach to teaching reading and writing is through peer tutoring. Slavin (1996) states that there is marked improvement in reading and writing results for students in the upper grades, typically in the middle and high school levels, who are paired with higher ability students in cooperative learning groups. Yet, despite promising reading and writing strategies, there are still major shortfalls in literacy assessment results.

The underperformance of our nation's students is, in fact, in such dire need of attention that our current administration enacted the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. This federal mandate, under the scrutiny of the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Services, was placed in the care of the National Center for Education Statistics "to address high-priority education data needs; provide consistent, reliable, complete, and accurate indicators of education status and trends; and report timely, useful, and high-quality data to the U.S.

Department of Education, Congress, the states, other education policymakers, practitioners, data users, and the general public" (Livingston, 2007, p. ii). For those concerned with the condition of education in the United States, the "high-priority" issues are simply the numbers of students underachieving at their respective grade levels. To illustrate the concern, and ultimately the concern of this Action Research Project which focuses on the secondary level, The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reported that the "national average reading scores of 4th and 8th graders has varied little over time, and in fact, both were 2 points higher in 2005 than in 1992, however, the scores of 12th graders declined 6 points during this period" (Livingston, 2007, p. 6). As part of this research, I sought to determine what strategies teachers are using in secondary reading and writing instruction and what instructional strategies correlate with particular state and federal assessment results. In accordance with the new federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), states, districts and educators must set and implement a plan that ensures all students are academically proficient in these areas by the year 2013-2014. From this initiative, it is important to identify how "effective" schools are teaching reading and writing to ensure their students are meeting these achievement goals.

Every new school year, classroom teachers around the country receive notice of the upcoming year's federal, state, and local district academic testing schedules. In years past, many achievement tests were administered on a bi-yearly basis, usually beginning in the 5th and 6th grade and then recommencing in the 8th grade, followed by a series of 10th grade tests in order to prepare students for their final 12th grade achievement tests and graduation. However, with such large gaps in the testing schedule, it became clear that there were some students who were underachieving before 5th grade, and many others who seemed to be proficient in one testing year, but not reading at their grade level by the next testing session. In fact, The National Center

for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported in 1999 that "forty percent of fourth graders read below a 'basic level' and have "little or no mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to perform work necessary at each grade level" (Bursuck, 2004, p. 5). The disparity between the NAEP and the NCES results seems to be due to a series of changing national indicators, including a vast increase in public school enrollment numbers, spoken home languages of minority school-age children, reading performance of students in grades 4, 8 and 12, student preparedness and public high school graduation rates.

The first area of concern for those involved in our nation's educational system is the enormous increase in student enrollment numbers. According to the NCES, "public school enrollment in prekindergarten (preK) through 12th grade increased in the latter part of the 1980's throughout the early 2000's, and is projected to reach and estimated 49.6 million students in 2007. Of these students, 34.6 million will be enrolled in preK-8th grade, and 15.0 million in grades 9-12. Total public school enrollment is projected to set new enrollment records each year from 2007 through 2016, at which time it is expected to reach an all-time high of 53.3 million" (Livingston, 2007, p. 2). These vast increases in student enrollment across the country means that districts, schools, and educators must address the needs of increasingly larger populations of students, while at the same time, increasing student achievement scores.

The largest population of newly enrolled students appears to be the increase of naturalized and immigrant students. For instance, "between 1979 and 2005, the number of school-age children (ages 5-17) who spoke a language other than English at home increased from 3.8 to 10.6 million (from 9 to 20 percent of the school-age population). An increase is also evident between 2000 and 2005 (18 to 20 percent)" (Livingston, 2007, p. 4). With an assumed increase of students whose primary language is not English, educators must also address the need

to create curricula in their classrooms that diminish the language barriers in students, therefore, decreasing the gap in achievement scores. This creates an increased complexity of reaching all students' reading and writing capabilities. School districts and schools are addressing the increased need for qualified English Language Learner (ELL) teachers and support staff, but this trend is challenging in regard to meeting all students' reading and writing literacy achievement goal of one-hundred percent, under the NCLB Act. In fact, according to two of the ELL Reading specialists I interviewed, challenges are especially present in non-designated ELL classrooms and for students who do not quality for ELL services, but whose abilities are not as academically strong as their English fluent peers.

It should also be noted that the tests themselves and how they are scored have changed drastically since the enactment of NCLB. The prior testing measures were scored and reported as a state's average score. Formerly, a student's test score was graded by the number of correct responses resulting in that student's final test score. Then the state totaled all students' final scores and calculated a state average to determine the states' passing proficient achievement level. Students who performed at average or above average were considered to have passed the state's proficiency achievement level and those who scored below the state's average were considered not achieving the state's academic proficiency achievement level. However, the new NCLB testing measures are not averaged among students' state scores, but rather by a mathematically calculated complex federal model that requires all students, and all subgroups of students, to perform at the "proficient" level. This creates an even more difficult achievement barrier among students without the same prior educational experience. According to the NAEP, "long-term trend results indicate that the reading and mathematics achievement of 9 and 13 year olds improved between the early 1970's and 2004…with an increase of 7 points between 1999

and 2004. Though the performance of the 17-year-olds on both NAEP assessments was not measurably different from prior years, scores for Black and Hispanic 17-year-olds have improved since the early 1970's" (Livingston, 2007, p. 9). While it may be true that these trends are positive indicators, it must also be shown that the scores' ranges over these years are fairly flat scores ranging between 280 to 290, out of a top score of 325. Clearly, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which requires students to make progress toward a one-hundred percent proficient goal by 2014, will fall seriously short of the new achievement standards that no longer accept "average" student test score data. It should also made clear at this point that NAEP exams do not count for accountability (Adequate Yearly Progress) in most states. Rather, it is the state test itself that is used as a marker for the one-hundred percent proficiency goal.

At an individual student level, there is a markedly changed shift in student preparedness that is a major concern for educators. An important indicator revealed that when measuring student preparedness for school, "the percentage of students who reported being chronically unprepared for school was larger in 2002 than in 1980. For example, the percentage who reported coming to school usually or often without their homework in 2002 was 26 percent, compared with 22 percent in 1980 and 18 percent in 1990" (Livingston, 2007, p. 11). Student preparedness, though not part of a *measurable* data requirement under NCLB, clearly is a concern for educators who must have students achieve high test score results. It seems logical to assume that students who do not come to school prepared with completed lessons will not have the base knowledge needed to perform in high stakes testing. It will continue to be a challenge for educators to find ways to increase student preparedness in order to have students show measurable growth in their schools' Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals.

One of the other high stakes concerns under NCLB is the national graduation rate. As published in "The Condition of Education 2007 in Brief," Livingston reported that "among all public high school students in the class of 2003-04, the *averaged freshman graduation rate* - an estimate of the percentage of an incoming freshmen class that graduates 4 years later with a regular diploma - was 75.0 percent in the 48 reporting states and the District of Columbia. Among the states that reported 2003-04 graduation rates, Nebraska had the highest averaged freshman graduation rate at 87.6 percent, and Nevada had the lowest rate at 57.4 percent. The overall averaged freshmen graduation rate among public school students increased from 71.7 percent for the class of 2000-01 to 75.3 percent for the class of 2003-04" (2007, p. 13). While it is encouraging to see that 15 states did show a graduation rate of 80 percent or more in the 2003-04 school year, the U.S Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported that 13 states had graduation rates of 75 to 79.9 percent, 9 states had graduation rates of 70 to 74.9 percent, 12 states had graduation rates less than 70 percent, and 2 states' rates were not available (Livingston, 2007, p. 13). However, under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Minnesota Department of Education reports that all "high schools must have an average graduation rate of 80 percent or show acceptable growth towards 80 percent" (2007, p. 13). Without a doubt, the current statistics are troublesome trends that the NCLB Act is mandating states, districts, and schools across the country not only to address, but to increase significantly.

From this data, it is evident that students must have the tools to improve not only reading and literacy achievement skills, but also to improve their basic preparedness and their perception of their school environment at a national level. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was ratified in order to more effectively track student achievement scores at earlier grade levels, and on a more regular, yearly schedule beginning as early as the first grade. Ideally, the test score

data will provide school leaders with helpful information in order to help children reach literacy and skill mastery in reading and writing performance as they progress toward and reach graduation. It should be noted that while statistics for student-level data on standardized reading tests are weak, however, they are effective at capturing school-level trends.

To ensure progression toward 100% proficiency, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandated that every state create a plan that would increase student academic performance at a level that would positively affect achievement proficiency in reading, math and science by 2014. The new law was enacted to make certain that states would no longer use test score data to find "averages" of students' achievement scores, but rather follow a new nation-wide calculable data system to more accurately measure student achievement. This data system was reconfigured in order to more accurately report achievement levels at a national level, rather than at the former state level, though the states are still ultimately responsible for improving underachieving districts and schools. This complex data scoring system was designed to closely measure student proficiency in relation to each school in order to ensure that all schools continue to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). According to the Minnesota Department of Education, schools not making AYP now must offer families and their students the option of transferring to another school or receiving extra tutoring help. Moreover, under NCLB, the state will hold districts and schools accountable for teaching all students, disaggregating the data by ethnic group, economic status, English language learner and special education needs (2007, p. 1). The goal of NCLB is clearly designed to close the achievement gap throughout the nation by allowing each state to address its unique student underachieving populations in these designated groups, or "cells," district by district, school by school, student by student.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota agreed to adopt and report on five required performance goals as part of its NCLB plan (2007, p. 2):

- Performance goal #1: By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- Performance goal #2: All Limited English Proficient (LEP) [or English Language Learners (ELL)] students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- Performance goal #3: By 2005-2006, all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.
- Performance goal #4: All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug-free and conducive to learning.
- Performance goal #5: All students will graduate from high school. (2007, p. 5)

In Minnesota, as well as in many other states, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the primary measuring tool to make certain that all students are improving achievement performance goals. The Minnesota Department of Education looks at each school's *participation, proficiency, attendance, and graduation* data in determining whether or not a school is making AYP.

Participation

As defined by the Minnesota Department of Education, "A requirement of NCLB is for schools to test at least 95 percent of all students across tested grades every year with state assessments in reading and mathematics. For the 2006-2007 school year and beyond, this means that schools are measured on the total number of students tested in grades 3-8, 10 (reading) and

11 (math). The 95 percent test participation requirement ensures that the test is delivered to a group that accurately represents the true abilities of the school's students. Participation results are then reported for the following nine groups (cells):

- All students
- White
- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Special Education (Sp. Ed.)
- American Indian
- Limited English Proficient (LEP/ELL)
- Free and Reduced Price Lunch (F & R)" (2007, p. 4)

Proficiency

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, "NCLB's goal is for students in tested grades to show progress so that 100 percent of students are proficient in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014…on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments II (MCA II). Results on the MCA-II are reported in four achievement levels: 1) Does not Meet Standard, 2) Partially Meets Standards, 3) Meets Standards and 4) Exceeds Standards. (The levels are alternatively known as D, P, M and E.)" (2007, p. 6). It should also be noted that for special education students and English Language Learners (ELL), there are alternative assessments in place for accurately measuring proficiency. The state of Minnesota allows a special education student's IEP team to determine whether or not the student can adequately perform well on the MCA-II. If the team determines that the MCA-II is inappropriate because of a student's

significant cognitive disability, then he or she can take an alternate test developed by the State, in consultation with the Special Education Department. Similarly, according to the Minnesota Department of Education, ELL students who cannot adequately perform the math section of the MCA-II, are allowed to take an alternative test named the "Mathematics Test for English Language Learners (MTELL)" (2007, p. 7). The special education alternate test and the MTELL are "scored in the same fashion as the MCA-II" (2007, p. 2). All of these tests provide the data that determine the proficiency index that indicates whether or not the school is achieving AYP in each tested content area.

Consequences

When a school does not make AYP, there are stages of consequences for schools not meeting their performance goals. Obviously, schools that make AYP are not subject to consequences, and labeled with no stage at all. However, according to the Minnesota Department of Education, when a school does not make AYP for one year, it is given a Stage 0 status. Similarly, when a school does not make AYP for two consecutive years in the same subject area, that school is given a Stage 1 status. After a school is in Stage 1, it must either make AYP in that subject area the next year, or it will be moved to Stage 2. After Stage 2, the performance criteria get more complicated. For example, if the school made AYP in that subject area and remained in stage 1 for a second year, then there are two possible outcomes for the following year: 1) the school makes AYP in that subject area and now is back in no stage and is free and clear of any AYP designation for that subject area; or 2) the school does not make AYP and moves to Stage 2. However, if the school did not make AYP in that subject area and moved to Stage 2 in the previous year, then there are two possible outcomes for the following year: 1) the school makes AYP in that subject are and remains in Stage 2 for a second year; or 2) the

school does not make AYP and moves to Stage 3 (2007, p. 19). In brief, a school must try to make AYP the next year, which will thereby drop it back to Stage 1, and if that school makes AYP the consecutive year, it moves to the no stage status. Consequently, if the school does make AYP for a second year, it remains in Stage 2, or moves to Stage 3 if the school does not make AYP for a third year. A school is subject to consequences when any group within the school misses AYP for two consecutive years in the same area. It should also be noted that federally mandated consequences extend only to schools that accept Title I funds. Consequences include:

- Notifying parents of the school's status;
- Writing and implementing a school improvement plan;
- Setting aside up to 20% of some district-level NCLB funds for school choice and supplemental services; and
- Setting aside 10% of some school-level NCLB funds for professional development (2007, p. 20).

Within this area of AYP calculations, there are other complex criteria that factor into a school's AYP standing, such as determining the cell size for a student group. According to the Minnesota Department of Education "schools must have at least 20 full academic year [students enrolled in the same school on October 1st and during the day of the test] across tested grades in a cell in order for the proficiency requirement to apply to a given cell" (2007, p. 9). This sets the index target for a student group, and configures a confidence interval, which then calculates the test score data that determines a school's proficiency index rate. In the example illustrated in the Minnesota Department of Education's "No Questions Left Behind" 2007 report, it discusses the following scenario: "Gopherville Elementary had 42 third, 42 fourth and 42 fifth-grade students

enrolled on test day. Three students (one in each grade) were not enrolled in the school on October 1st so those three are not included in this calculation. One hundred and twenty-three students across these grades were present for the academic year and tested. Gopherville Elementary school's "All Students" reading test scores were as follows:

- 25 third grade students achieved level MWWTS or EXCEEDS THE STANDARDS (score 350 or above) on their MCA II;
- 26 fourth grade students achieve levels MEETS or EXCEEDS THE STANDARDS (score 450 or above) on their MCA II, and
- 25 fifth grade students achieve levels MEETS or EXCEEDS THE STANDARDS (score 550 or above) on their MCA II.
- 4 third grade students achieve level PARTIALLY MEETS THE STANDARDS (score between 340 and 350) on their MCA II;
- 4 fourth grade students achieve level PARTIALLY MEETS THE STANDARDS (score between 440 and 450) on their MCA II, and
- 4 fifth grade students achieve level PARTIALLY MEETS THE STANDARDS (score between 540 and 550) on their MCA II.
- 12 third grade students, 11 fourth grade students and 12 fifth grade students achieved level DOES NOT MEET THE STANDARDS (score between X00 and X40) on their MCA II.

So to calculate their index:

Number of students gaining 1 point: 76=76 pts.

Number of students gaining .5 points: 12=6 pts.

Number of students gaining 0 points: 35=0 pts.

Total = 88 points

The school's total number of index points generated was 82 (76+6+0). The greatest number of index points the school's students might have generated (if they had all tested as proficient) is 123. Thus, the school generated an actual index rate of 82/123 x 100 or 66.67 (2007, p. 13). All of this culminates in determining whether or not a school makes the proficiency target, or AYP. From this determination, schools may get the opportunity to sit a "safe harbor" status if a particular scoring group is making at least a ten percent improvement rate in a one year testing span.

While all these factors are important in understanding the intricacies of AYP under NCLB, and in understanding the research data conducted in this study, it is not imperative to discuss any more of them in detail here. On the other hand, many of these areas needed to be addressed as they are important aspects of the findings discussed later in this research. Of course, those wanting a more fully detailed explanation of these calculations and stipulations can find the information by referring to the sources listed in the reference section of this project.

There are also some very important school funding and operating issues that concern districts and schools not making AYP. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, "federally mandated consequences extend only to schools that accept Title I funds [and] a school is subject to consequences when any group within the school misses AYP for two consecutive years in the same area. Consequences include: notifying parents of the school's status, writing and implementing a school improvement plan, setting aside up to 20 percent of some district-level NCLB funds for school choice and supplemental services, and setting aside 10 percent of some school-level NCLB funds for professional development" (2007, p. 20). In the same way that funding affects Title I schools, and ways those individual schools are held accountable for

AYP, all corresponding districts follow similar consequential corrective measures in order to make improvements toward AYP, except that the districts must adhere to funding restrictions in accordance with federal NCLB programs. These programs include: incorporating scientifically based research to strengthen core academic subjects, addressing teaching and learning needs, improving professional development, including parent involvement strategies, and incorporating enrichment activities into the district's curricula. NCLB is an initiative that drives districts around the nation to improve test achievement scores as an incentive to get districts and schools the funding they need to improve the quality of education. The question remains: What does all this have to do with achieving high student literacy results? The answer is not as ambiguous as it may seem. The fact is that all educational leaders must work toward teaching all students core and supplementary curricula while improving achievement test results. We now teach in an age that makes it mandatory to improve students' ability to pass achievement tests at a more elevated level than in the past, while maintaining and improving the sense of integrity that comes from becoming well-rounded, educated people.

Clearly, test result data are important information for educators to have in order to target problem areas in student groups who are underperforming in literacy achievement. Without this data, teachers would have to spend too much valuable time at the beginning of the school year evaluating students on their own to see where students' skill mastery levels relate to other students in the classroom, and how they might perform on their next state and federally mandated achievement levels.

In order to better ascertain the significance of the literacy problem among their students, teachers must look at the effects of their curriculum and ways it positively affects the high academic standards students must achieve under NCLB. Specifically, teachers must consider the

implications of what they have seen improve student achievement results in the past, and ways they can incorporate their previously effective Basal instruction (phonics), whole language learning (text comprehension), and cooperative group learning (peer) approaches into even higher student achievement levels. For example, there is significant data that show "for all the whole language studies combined . . . children receiving basal instruction did consistently better on the various literacy measures than their counterparts who received whole language instruction" (Jeynes, 2000, p. 25-26). Conversely, "whole language advocates place phonics and skills in the context of reading whole and predictable texts and view phonics as one of the cueing systems – along with the meaning and structure of the text – that readers use" (Routman, 1997, p. 3) in order to make sense of the text. Consequently, "when educators and communities have given adequate time, training, and resources to whole language instruction and learning, the results have been overwhelmingly positive" (Routman, 1997, p. 4). Additionally, "cooperative learning has been found to have positive effects on a variety of other important educational outcomes. These include liking of school, development of peer norms in favor of doing well academically, feelings of individual control over the student's own fate in school and cooperativeness and altruism" (Slavin, 1996, p. 4). As a result of this seemingly conflicting data from various studies, it remains problematic for teachers to determine which of the above approaches to literacy is best for student achievement in the classroom.

Teachers direct their classrooms every day with their own thoroughly thought out curricula, well prepared lesson plans, and a dedication to student learning. There is the intention of meeting the needs of their students in a number of ways; the highest one of which being the teacher's attention to students' individual academic achievement potential. As leaders and role models for hundreds of students each year, the classroom teacher has to carefully evaluate what

kind of curriculum will best support federal, state and school district testing standards, while at the same time addressing the individual learning styles of multiple intelligences in the classroom. It takes a great deal of time, and an even greater ability of organizational skills to balance all of these criteria in approximately 170 school days per year. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect on literacy achievement from teachers' specific curriculum approaches, while at the same time, searching for the most effective means of meeting the criteria of the NCLB goals.

Most educators respond positively and pro-actively to the implications and the importance of recent research findings and new curricula approaches to improve student achievement goals. Likewise, Language Arts and English teachers realize that it is a high priority to provide the necessary instruction their students need to become proficient readers and writers. Developing a curriculum that will enrich both the students' content knowledge, as well as provide students with improved test-taking strategies that will enhance their performance on achievement tests, is extremely important to the success of classroom teachers, despite the challenges she or he must address.

Literature Review

Educators widely accept new and developing trends in curricula that address the ongoing need to adapt and modify their understanding of what improves student literacy achievement. For the English, Language Arts and the Limited English Proficient teachers who want to close the literacy achievement gap among large groups of culturally and academically diverse students, they must rely on current legislative directives, as well as the readily available and immense amount of studies and literature that challenges investigators to analyze and explain how teachers' classrooms work. By keeping current with new and innovative instruction methods

from educational literature, teachers are better equipped to adjust and adopt important data findings, from both quantifiable and qualifiable studies, in order to positively affect literacy achievement among the students in their own classrooms.

For example, Bursuck (2004) evaluated the effectiveness of the PRIDE (Preventing and Remediating Reading Problems Through Early Identification and Direct Teaching of Early Literacy Skills) project in order to study literacy achievement from a specific curriculum approach to reading improvement. Project PRIDE "is a model for preventing reading failure that employs a combination of systematic, explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics with a total classroom reading program; a multi-tiered teaching approach; data-based decision making; and professional development that includes ongoing, on-site coaching" (p. 2). The approaches to the study include: 1) Instruction in phonological awareness that facilitates reading acquisition; 2) Instruction in phonemic awareness integrated with the direct instruction of the alphabetic principle that facilitates reading acquisition; 3) Prepare reading fluency for students as they comprehend a text; 4) Determine the degree of acquiring reading skills from those students who require less intensive instruction to those requiring more intensive instruction. The subjects in the evaluation included elementary students in grades K-3 from an "urban setting, [who] were ethically diverse, and had a significant number of students not meeting state standards in reading" (p. 3), and were randomly selected from a convenience sampling. The procedure focused on five key skill areas in reading: 1) phonemic awareness; 2) alphabetic principle; 3) reading fluency; 4) vocabulary; 5) reading comprehension. The results showed that of the 90 students, who completed the project, 48 achieved successful reading in a whole-class environment, 15 achieved success with a whole-class environment plus additional individual help, and 27 achieved success with a more intensive small-group instructional setting.

The study concluded "that for schools with a high percentage of children who are at risk, a range of instructional options is a necessity" (p. 8). From this study, it is clear that additional research needs to be conducted that includes all student populations. Moreover, due to the lack of baseline measures for both the PRIDE and the control group at the beginning of the study, there could be potential problems with the achievement data. Also, the study would have been better if the groups of students were randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions. However, the findings do seem to indicate the need for teachers to lead their classrooms with multiple approaches to learning, with a focus on student differentiation.

Two other authors, Jeynes and Littell (2000), conducted a meta-analysis of fourteen studies that examined the question of whether whole language instruction improves the reading achievement skills of students. The approaches to the curriculum included: 1) the instruction of entire texts rather than adaptations or segments of literature; 2) student choice rather than teacher chosen whole-class assignments; 3) integrated language experiences rather than direct instruction. The subjects studied in this meta-analysis, ranging over approximately ten years of combined studies, were primarily students from low-socioeconomic status, and were primary school students. The results indicated that the students receiving Basal instruction did consistently better on literacy measures as well as on standardized tests. However, when the study changed the definition of whole language approach to a more pure, student-centered learning environment, whole language instruction seemed preferable. The conclusion of the study seemed to rest on whether one wants to analyze student achievement by standardized or non-standardized test results. From a standardized test analysis, Basal instruction had higher achievement results. From a non-standardized test analysis, there were better results with a whole language approach. The authors of the study conceded that whole language instruction

needed to be clearly defined and studied further, based on specific criteria the same way Basal instruction is delivered. Another major flaw in the data was that there were no consistent measures that accurately determined the definition of the different values. Moreover, classroom management strategies varied greatly among the studies, as well as the student population demographics. Unfortunately, teacher implications were not discussed in this review, though the data seem to indicate that the success rate is dependent on how the teacher approaches student learning in the individual classroom. In conclusion, the interaction effect between the approaches is interesting and is a condition worthy of future, more controlled studies.

In correlation to the studies discussed above, The National Reading Panel (NRP) was constructed by Congress in order to assess the status of research-based knowledge on the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. The following is an evidence-based assessment of the *Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications* for Reading Instruction. The variables in this meta-analytical study were based entirely on phonemic awareness instruction in the curriculum. The values included 1) analogy phonetics; 2) analytic phonics; 3) embedded phonics; 4) phonics through spelling; 5) synthetic phonics. The subjects ranged from studies conducted throughout the United States from "more than 100,000 published since 1966 and more than 15,000 prior to 1966" (2000, p. 3). The procedure relied on a common coding form developed by the panel's members that included the following categories: 1) Comprehension monitoring; 2) Cooperative learning; 3) Use of graphic and semantic organizers; 4) Question answering; 5) Question generation; 6) Story structure; 7) Summarization. In general, the results suggest that teaching a combination of reading comprehension techniques is the most effective. When students use each category appropriately, improved results in standardized comprehension tests are apparent. Additionally, the

implications indicate that a firm grasp of the content must be present in order to affect improvement. Moreover, teachers must also have critical knowledge of which strategies are most effective for different students. In brief, the study is thorough and comprehensive and directly responds to what teachers need to know when planning curriculum.

Another approach, by Robert Slavin (1996), studied the effect of cooperative leaning in middle and secondary schools exclusively. Three principle Student Team Learning methods have been extensively developed and researched in secondary schools (grades 6-12): Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD), Teams-Games-Tournament (TGT), and Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), which is used in reading and writing instruction in grades 3-7. The study's variables are based on academic achievement through cooperative learning-instructional programs in which students work in small groups to help one another master academic content. The study sought to determine whether a cooperative learning environment will effectively aid student skill mastery if all members of the team are responsible for one another's learning, as well as their own. The approaches to the study include a variety of subjects: 1) mathematics; 2) language arts; 3) social studies. The subjects are comprised of student teams from: 1) mixed performance levels; 2) gender; 3) ethnicity. The procedure began with the teacher assigning students to four-member learning teams. The teacher presented a lesson after which students work in the teams to make sure that all team members have mastered the lesson. All the students then take individual tests on the material. Students' test scores are compared with their own past averages and points are awarded based on performance. According to Slavin, the results showed that of these studies, 63 percent found significantly greater achievement, 31 percent found no differences, and in 5 percent, the control groups outperformed the experimental groups (p. 5). The implications for teachers clearly indicate that

they must be clear and concise in the initial lessons, and be willing to adapt to the role of student-centered advisor rather than a direct instructor. Overall, this study is a much needed positive approach to an effective learning strategy at the secondary level. There is far too little research on older adolescent achievement levels, hence leaving a void for teaching strategies. The study is brief, but concise in its findings.

Another study, which focused on only secondary English students, looked at two diverse ninth-grade English student populations and were asked to participate in a reading engagement and interpretation study based on a multicultural novel. One group of students resided in Nevada, and attended an urban technology magnet school; the other group of students resided in Hawaii and attended a rural public school. Both student populations were selected from a committee who based their selection on the students' completed applications, report cards, teacher recommendations, and by program space availability. Students were asked to keep a free-writing journal, a character interpretation journal and to write a research paper on the novel's cultural authenticity.

The researchers of this study, Bean, Cantu' Valerio, Senior and White (1999), found that the "students produced more personal and interpretive reactions to the novel than simple descriptions of events and had a strong sense of agency and voice, supported by reader-based teaching" (p. 32). The authors contend that previous research conducted on reading achievement has indeed shown a positive trend in active engagement when students frequently read a variety of literary works, but the authors were surprised to find that these students "displayed intense affective responses to the novel, as well as exuberance and a sense of agency in their responses [and] talked about the characters in terms of real, living people and wrote . . . with enthusiasm"

(p. 35), which the authors believe was the result of the literature response theory conducted in this study.

The authors argue that the contemporary model of the literature response theory is responsible for the marked improvement in the students' ability to comprehend a multicultural novel with a deeper, more personal critical eye than did students who looked at the same novel with a more traditional, or teacher-based interpretive theory. The study clearly indicates that if students are asked to perform in an educative context (i.e. journal writing and critical thinking development inspired from a differing cultural point of view), combined with a sense of personal empowerment that allows them to question and give meaning to their work, students begin to look at themselves as high achievers, which was clearly modeled by the results of this study. As an English teacher, this study epitomizes the best possible outcome of what can happen to students when they are actively engaged in literature. It is an important study to remember when choosing literature and incorporating it into curricula. As teachers, we must embrace the fact that students can and do learn when they are taught, then guided, then allowed to enjoy literature selections, with their own points of view left intact and validated.

One significant approach to literacy at the secondary level that has been widely acclaimed as a reading tool that enhances the self-confidence and reading skills of older students is *Read 180. Read 180* was developed in collaboration with Vanderbilt University to support school districts in their efforts to improve reading achievement for students reading below grade level. It was originally designed to improve deficiencies in the upper elementary and middle grade levels. Its main objective was to target students who lacked decoding skills and reading fluency, and had the inability to form mental models and visual images due to a lack of vocabulary and background knowledge. It also targeted students who displayed low motivation

and lack of connection to materials and students who showed an inability to process and relate to text in the content areas.

Read 180 combines practices of reading with the use of technology, which offers students an opportunity to achieve reading fluency through a combination of instructionally modeled independent reading and teacher directed instruction. However, the *Read 180* classroom bases its success on the combination of the following elements: "90 minute class periods, reduced class size, students engaging in daily instructional reading through the *Read 180* software, students engaging in daily modeled or independent reading practice, and students receiving daily individual or small-group teacher instruction" (Scholastic, 2000). There is also a structured "*Read 180* day" that requires a consistent teacher effort and focus on the strict principles and guidelines imbedded into this program. According to Scholastic, if a particular school can accommodate the principles and guidelines into its school's daily schedule, their statistics show "an average two years' growth in [students'] reading level each year" if they are using the program correctly (2000).

Clearly, the data on this literacy building program shows remarkable promise for students of all ages. Moreover, the potential this program has for increasing the literacy achievement for older students is extremely promising. For older, secondary age students who have missed important literacy building skills throughout their educational careers, or for older students who have come to the United States later in life and are learning English for the first time, this program offers them hope for graduation among their same age peers. A literacy-building program like *Read 180* helps students not only learn to read and write effectively and appropriately in English, but helps them pass the demands of American standardized tests in

their grade level more quickly and efficiently than traditional classroom instruction, even if their classroom environments incorporate Basal, whole language and cooperative group instruction.

In summary, this literature review clearly establishes an over-arching theme that a combined instructional approach that incorporates Basal, cooperative and whole language practices in the classroom benefits student achievement in improved reading skills. However, the literature does seem to indicate limitations in Basal or phonemic instruction because it tends to have a higher level in reading achievement for younger children in the primary grades. For students at the secondary level who continue to struggle with reading and writing skills, a cooperative learning environment that is largely student-centered seems to be the most effective way for students to meet achievement standards. Also, the literature indicates positive implications for teachers who are well prepared in training and lesson planning and have skill building programs available to them. According to the literature, it is also extremely important that teachers have a deep understanding and fondness of their respective content area. The literature also illustrates a positive common theme among teachers who have an engaged delivery style, which seems to provide a more productive classroom environment. It appears that students respond favorably to a good teacher who leads students in an environment that is flexible, yet concentrated on students' individual needs. Literature in this subject area seems to indicate that when a teacher can successfully balance a rigorous curriculum while maintaining close student-teacher relationships, student literacy achievement improves.

Methods

Overview

This research will answer the question "how are teachers in successful secondary school settings teaching literacy?" To answer this question, I have selected a sample of several schools

that fit the following criteria: 1) At least 20 percent of the school's population had to be English language learners (I excluded schools with little SES, ethnic or linguistic diversity), and 2) Schools had to be making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) according to state standardized test scores in reading. In this research study I sought to understand how teachers reach diverse secondary students by surveying and interviewing teachers from successful schools. The study examined secondary teachers' approaches to reading and writing mastery skills from different curricula approaches such as: 1) foundational skill instruction (phonics); 2) whole language learning (text comprehension); 3) cooperative group learning (peer-based); 4) a combination of any of 1-3; or 5) other. Individual teachers were sent: 1) a consent letter outlining the purpose of this study; 2) a survey; and 3) a self-addressed stamped enveloped to be returned by U.S. Mail. The main focus of the survey was for teachers to answer a variety of questions pertaining to the curricula approaches currently being used in successful secondary classroom environments, and the approaches secondary teachers perceived as the most effective in reaching student literacy achievement results.

The surveys did not ask for individual teacher names, but were coded to determine from which school districts from which they came. This information was explained in the accompanying letter (See Appendix A). The data was collected and analyzed, and all of the information gathered was kept highly confidential. All collected data was kept in a locked file cabinet in my home office and will be destroyed three years after the study is completed which is anticipated to be on January 31, 2011. Risk of personal identification was extremely unlikely because surveys were anonymous. However, respondents were told that anonymity could not be fully guaranteed.

In addition to conducting survey research, I also conducted qualitative interviews with three reading or curriculum specialists in different schools. The basis of these interviews was to discuss their perceptions on the effectiveness of literacy program adoption, and the history of the various programs schools have adopted into their curriculum over a length of at least five years (See Appendix C). From this information, I hoped to better understand how teachers in successful schools were reaching students and how I may use this information to better inform my own teaching.

Instruments

I originally received permission from six Minneapolis metropolitan area school districts to conduct research in their secondary schools' English and reading departments. I wanted a random mix of male and female teachers. I did not know whether teachers were probationary or tenured. I did not know the ethnicity of any of the teachers, nor did I know of any or their affiliations or teaching philosophies. From those original six districts, one high school was eliminated because it did not meet one of my criterion of the research that at least 20 percent of the schools had to be culturally diverse. From the remaining five districts, adequate survey data was received.

The first area of research in which I was interested was based on literacy building programs with which teachers were **familiar**. I asked teachers to respond to programs from the following list:

_____ AGS Basic Grammar
_____ Daily Oral Language (Evan-Moor Corp.)
_____ Ed Helper
_____ Kansas Strategies Sentence Writing
_____ PhonoSpell Techniques
_____ Program Phonics
_____ Read Naturally
_____ Read 180

The second area of research I was interested in was based on literacy building programs teachers have actually used in the **past five years**. I asked teachers to respond to programs from the same list.

I then asked teachers to indicate what grade levels they have taught using these programs. I broke them down in the following groups: _____5-7 _____ 8-9 _____10-12

I also wanted to know what programs teachers have used in the past five years that I did not list on the survey. I left five optional blanks for this response. I also asked that teachers indicate what grade levels they taught using these "other" programs.

Considering all of the possible literacy programs that teachers have used, either from the list I provided, programs I did not list, or both, I asked teachers to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level. I offered teachers five spaces for their responses.

The final section of the survey asked several questions (see Appendix B). I felt that these structured questions and answers would give me the best possible initial information I needed to begin answering my original research question: "How are teachers in successful secondary school settings teaching literacy?" Accordingly, after looking at the data, I now knew what and how teachers were teaching to improve literacy at the secondary level, and as a result expanded my research to: "Which schools were successful?"

Sample

To find the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results for the districts I targeted in my data collection, I referred to the State of Minnesota's AYP reports found on the Minnesota Department of Education website. From this source, I could accurately ascertain which of the districts were making AYP, which academic indicator category types were reaching achievement

levels, which districts were not making AYP, and the academic indicator categories of students identified as not making AYP. This information was integral in helping ascertain whether my targeted survey research data corresponded with the State achievement results in reading.

Before a clear analysis of my research data findings is discussed, I believe it is important to look at the State of Minnesota's AYP data for the current year. This data is the primary issue for all districts, schools and educators, and is the driving force behind finding effective literacy building programs and curriculum solutions for reaching the 100 percent proficiency achievement goals for all our students by the year 2014. The following table (Table 1) shows a summary analysis of all Minnesota schools that are and are not making AYP.

AYP 2007 Summary Analysis - SCHOOLS				
9/29/2007 - 2:10 AM				
	Number of Schools	**Making AYP**	**Not Making AYP**	**Insufficient Data**
All AYP Entities	2013	1189	729	95
High Schools (32,33)	440	248	189	3
Junior High / Middle Schools (20,31)	234	123	111	0
Elementary Schools (10)	951	698	233	20
Alternate Learning Programs (41, 42, 43)	315	101	176	38
Charter Schools	153	75	75	3
Next Year Title 1 Schools	817	544	270	3
AYP Entities by region				
Minneapolis and Saint Paul	176	43	120	13
7 County Metro Area	690	387	252	51
Outstate - more than 2000	368	216	144	8
Outstate - 1000 - 2000	264	176	83	5
Outstate - 500 - 1000	242	167	69	6
Outstate - less than 500	273	200	61	12

Table 1

Out of 2,013 total Minnesota schools, 1,189 or 59 percent are making AYP. Conversely, 729, or 36 percent are not making AYP; 95, or 5 percent have insufficient AYP data to report. In the seven county Metropolitan Area (the area I targeted for my research), the number remained fairly

consistent with the overall statewide findings. Out of 690 Metropolitan area schools, 387, or 56 percent are making AYP. Similarly, out of 387 area schools, 36 percent are not making AYP, and an increase of 8 percent, or 51 Metropolitan area schools, had insufficient data to report.

These numbers, while alarming to the number of schools not making AYP, were especially important to the analysis of my collected data information. As stated earlier, my data collection methodology originally focused on the following criteria: 1) At least 20 percent of the school population had to be culturally diverse, and 2) Schools had to be making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) according to state standardized test scores in reading. However, during my data identification process, it became apparent that the parameters of my research goals had to be reconsidered for analysis purposes, or that I would have to report that my data did not, or could not accurately answer my research question. For example, when my early data came in, I found that under my initial criteria, one-sixth of my targeted districts would have to be immediately eliminated because of criterion number one. Moreover, if I eliminated schools under criterion number two, I would have to eliminate two other districts of my targeted research data, leaving very little quantifiable data to properly analyze. In consideration of these facts, I studied the State research further.

When I first analyzed my data, I looked at the 2006 data, which at the time was the most current data available. However, when the new 2007 data became available, I realized one of the districts that had made AYP in 2006 did not make AYP in 2007. I then theorized that perhaps even the four original school districts that were not making AYP were making progress toward AYP, since it became apparent that there were many schools struggling to overcome violation of NCLB standards from year to year. My justification for this thinking was still centered on my research question and remained viable: Which curricula approach are found in schools with high

student achievement scores from state and federal standardized test results at the secondary level? I felt that the answer to good district, school, and teacher curricula choices were still qualifiable even in schools not making AYP because they may well be improving under the 10 percent rule. I decided at this point to include all of my collected data from the high schools in all five remaining districts.

I looked at the Department of Education's data for schools not making AYP by indicator. As discussed earlier, the indicators are the performance goals that measure the data that ensures that all students are improving and that districts and schools are working toward AYP. As stated, the Minnesota Department of Education looks at each schools *participation, proficiency, attendance,* and *graduation* data in determining whether or not a school is making AYP. As indicated in the following table (Table 2), the state data shows that 176 high schools are not making AYP in the area of *proficiency*. As noted earlier, *proficiency* is the NCLB's goal for students in tested grades to show progress, so that 100 percent of students are proficient in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014 in four achievement levels: D, P, M and E. The data on Table 2 clearly shows that 40 percent of Minnesota's high schools are not meeting AYP in *proficiency*.

The other area of concern in high schools not making AYP is the *participation* indicator. To recall, the *participation* indicator, as defined by the Minnesota Department of Education, is a requirement of NCLB to test at least 95 percent of all students across tested grades every year with state assessments in reading and mathematics. The 95 percent test participation requirement ensures that the test is delivered to a group that accurately represents the true abilities of the school's students. Participation results are then reported for the following nine groups (cells):

- All students
- White

- Black
- Hispanic
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Special Education (Sp. Ed.)
- American Indian
- Limited English Proficient (LEP/ELL)
- Free and Reduced Price Lunch (F & R)" (2007)

As Tables 1 and 2 show, 35 out of 440, or 8 percent of Minnesota high schools are not making AYP in the *participation* indicator. However, 182, or 41 percent of Minnesota high schools are not making AYP by either indicator. In addition, it should also be reported that a very low 5 percent of Minnesota high schools are not making AYP in the other two indicators: *attendance* and *graduation*, which is, I believe, a very encouraging number presently in these areas, and a number that can be targeted and reduced further in the near future.

9/29/2007	**Not Making AYP by Indicator**			
	Academic Indicators			
	Proficiency	*Participation*	*Either*	Other Indicators
All AYP Entities	672	103	694	117
High Schools	176	35	182	23
Junior High / Middle Schools	108	7	111	2
Elementary Schools	226	15	232	7
Alternate Learning Programs	150	39	154	75
Charter Schools	60	24	67	22
Next Year Title 1 Schools	256	34	265	32

Table 2

In order to get closer to my targeted research data and my larger research question, I needed to consider another collection of data from the Minnesota Department of Education. After acknowledging the fact that there are many Minnesota schools that are not making AYP by specific indicators, it is important to analyze which group of students is the largest achievement

proficiency concern demographically. Although the following data does not qualify which schools have what *category type* or specific student population numbers (however, those numbers are available of the Minnesota Department of Education website listed by district and school, and will be discussed in relation to my targeted districts), the data shown in Table 3 does identify a clear illustration of who is and who is not achieving proficiency in reading and math.

Of the schools identified under either of the academic indicators							
Number of Schools Identified by Category Type	**MATH**	**READING**	**Either Subject**	**% Identified Total**	**Categories Identified**	**Count of Schools**	**% Identified Total**
All Students	254	157	295	42.5%	1	393	56.6%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	25	21	31	4.5%	2	132	19.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	17	26	35	5.0%	3	72	10.4%
Hispanic	52	43	78	11.2%	4	59	8.5%
Black	106	88	139	20.0%	5	19	2.7%
White	44	26	49	7.1%	6	11	1.6%
Limited English Proficient	89	70	122	17.6%	7	7	1.0%
Special Education	196	237	328	47.3%	8	1	0.1%
Free/Reduced Priced Meals	172	154	250	36.0%	9	0	0.0%
						694	

Table 3

From this data, it is apparent that the student subgroups, statewide, to reach in areas of improved academic achievements are in this order of priority: special education, students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch, Blacks, Limited English Proficient and Hispanic students.

Not surprisingly, the data I received on my targeted Metropolitan area high schools are closely representative of the overall State findings. In order to keep the schools' anonymity, I will refer to my schools using numbers 1-5. After discussing these schools' appropriate AYP data, I will identify which literacy building programs and curricula each school uses, and most

importantly, what teachers thought was the most effective curricula approach to improving academic achievement results.

Researched High Schools
2007 - AYP Reading Results

9/29/2007

School Number	Title 1?	K-12 Enrollment	Free/Reduced Lunch Pct	# Groups Identified- Academic	AYP Consequence	Reading								
						Participation								
						All	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Black	White	LEP	Special Ed	Free/Reduced Lunch
001	NO	2555	17	0	Making AYP	Yes	-	-	-	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
002	NO	2003	17	1	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
003	NO	1675	24	3	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
004	NO	1634	47	5	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	-	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
005	NO	1997	40	3	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
						Proficiency								
001	NO	2555	17	0	Making AYP	Yes	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
002	NO	2003	17	1	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	Yes	No
003	NO	1675	24	3	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	-	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
004	NO	1634	47	5	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
005	NO	1997	40	3	Not Making AYP	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Table 4

As an overview, there are a few commonalities these schools share, and a few areas in which they differ. In order to more easily follow the flow of Table 4, these areas will be discussed from left to right across the table. First, none of the researched schools is receiving Title 1 funding, and for the purposes of this research study, this point is inconsequential. Second, although the total K-12 enrollment numbers seem to be dissimilar, the high schools that I targeted, nevertheless, have similarly large high school student enrollment. Third, although

schools #001 and #002 have a very low free and reduced lunch rate participation among their students in proportion to their enrollment population, the numbers of students participating in this program is, nevertheless, a significant number in analyzing this data further. Fourth, all of the schools properly identified the cell groups that applied to their schools out of nine possible groups. One school has continuously made AYP, reports 0 groups identified, this is the proper reporting practice by the State for all districts making AYP. It is obvious by the data that this school does have student populations in the qualifiable cell groups. Fifth, all of the researched schools had student population numbers high enough to report the "yes" status for participation and proficiency numbers. Sixth, it is interesting to report that even though all of these schools are in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area, and four are considered "urban" schools, none of them had a student group that had enough American Indian students to report in this cell size. Seventh, in schools that reported having Asian, Hispanic, White and LEP cell group sizes large enough to report, all of those students are making AYP in the reading criteria. Last, in the schools that reported having Black, Special Education and students who qualified for Free and Reduced Lunch with cell group sizes large enough to report, many of those students are not making AYP in the reading criteria.

Analysis

I started analyzing my data inductively. I began by looking for large themes that either linked together or shared a few or no common traits. From my survey data, I matched the literacy building program patterns that participants used, and transcribed key phrases and descriptive devices participants used by using spreadsheet software and note cards, respectively. I was able to easily calculate the matched data I received from my surveys because I had asked participants to simply check boxes of the literacy building programs with which they were

familiar, and the literacy building programs with which they had actually used during the past five years. Using simple addition from the spreadsheet software, I could easily ascertain which literacy building programs were known and most often used in the classrooms. For the more open ended questions on my survey, I coded the data on note cards. The coding approach enabled me to sort responses in categories and to check for common themes. Although some of the responses I received were descriptive in nature, the majority of the feedback simply reported additional literacy building programs not offered on my checklist. In these cases, I was able to easily add that data to my spreadsheet, which created additional, but small amounts of new literacy building program categories to consider. From the responses that were more descriptive in nature, I wrote down key terms and phrases and coded them to match the corresponding school. I could then sort them to make connections to common themes. The majority of those responses resulted in themes that were attributed to their specific job duties with students, the qualifications of certain program use with certain groups of students, curriculum choices made by the districts and teachers, and "frustration" by those who don't feel that they are effectively reaching their students. All of this data analysis is described in the following findings section.

During my interview process, I transcribed all of my field notes. My interview questions served as organized way to sort the responses I received (See Appendix C). I recorded the data from my field notes onto cards, which I also coded by school. From these data cards, I again looked for common themes shared or not shared by the participants. The common thematical connections among those I interviewed stated an overwhelming sense of "willingness," "hopefulness," "dedication," and "perseverance." Even among educators whose schools were not making AYP, there was still a common theme that "all students can reach adequate literacy

achievement goals." However, many did not agree that there was ever going to be one definitive way to reach the goals stipulated by NCLB.

Findings

The following describes the results of my collected data by each of the high schools I surveyed. In some cases, I have also included relevant data in the form of qualitative analyses from the interviews I conducted with some of the schools' reading and/or language specialists in the targeted high schools or in their correlating district offices. The participants wanted to retain their anonymity under the same stipulations I offered in my survey data collection process, and I concurred with their request. In order to more clearly understand my research results, it will be helpful to reference Table 4 while comparing the data of each of the following high school teachers' responses in order to fully understand the primary focus of my survey: The following data collection questions were asked so I could ascertain whether or not I found patterns to the curricula approaches teachers use to positively affect student achievement scores in their high school students' reading tests.

High School #001 (Reference Table 4)

This high school is part of one the largest school districts in the state of Minnesota; it is considered "urban;" it is also the only one in my research sites that is making AYP. Although this high school is not as culturally diverse as the other schools in my research, it does contain a low, but noteworthy number of Special Education students and students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch services. According to the data, even though these numbers are very similar to high school #002, this school is reaching academic achievement levels with students in reading both in ***participation*** and ***proficiency***.

From the data I received from teachers in this school, 100 percent (10) reported that they were familiar with the literacy programs I outlined in my survey **except** AGS Basic Grammar and Ed Helper. In response to the second page of my survey the following data was collected:

Responses from High School #001

1. **Primary teaching method?**
   50 percent of the teachers used a student centered approach.
   50 percent used mixed teaching methods.

2. **Primary curriculum approach to reading?**
   50 percent used whole language as the primary curricula approach to reading.
   50 percent used a combination of curriculum approaches.

3. **Reading ability groups?**
   50 percent **did not** use reading groups.

4. **Primary focus on writing skills?**
   100 percent used essay writing.
   50 percent used paragraph development.

5. **Writing ability groups?**
   50 percent **did not** use writing teams based on writing ability.

6. **Who ultimately decides your curriculum?**
   50 percent stated the district decided their curriculum.
   50 percent stated it was a combination of their choice and the district's choice.

7. **Meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement?**
   100 percent stated that they **were meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.

- When asked to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

  100 percent of these teachers stated that they felt **no one program was enough to achieve high literacy achievement results**.

In summary, this high school seems to be doing a lot of things right. There is a lot of consistency in both the teaching methods and the approaches to reading and writing strategies among the English Department in this high school. During an interview I conducted with a

tenured member of the English department with years of experience in teaching standard English and in less proficient English classrooms, the teacher stated, "there is a unified team structure in place for achieving district standards in their content area and in respect to their need to increase standardized test scores." However, this teacher acknowledges the research that shows the benefits of cooperative learning groups in reading and writing and wants to increase these practices into the English department's curriculum. This teacher also acknowledges the pride among the staff who knows they are doing a great job with the students' focused reading ability, but knows more can always be accomplished. The teacher also stated that "the members of the English department pay close attention to their district curriculum, but at the same time their district allows teachers to teach to their students' individual needs." The positive result is clear; the teachers believe they are reaching their students and the school is making AYP.

High School #002 (Reference Table 4)

This high school is considered "suburban" and it made AYP in 2006 but not in 2007. This high school is more culturally diverse than high school #001 in its reported Black population and has approximately the same number of special education students and students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch services. According to the data, even though these numbers are very similar to high school #001, and #002 is making AYP on ***participation***, #002 is **not making AYP** in its population of Free and Reduced Price Lunch students in reading ***proficiency***.

From the data I received from teachers in this school, 100 percent (4) reported that they were familiar with **only** Daily Oral Language, Ed Helper, Read Naturally and Read 180. In response to the second page of my survey, the following data were collected:

Responses from High School #002

1. **Primary teaching method?**
   100 percent used mixed teaching methods

2. **Primary curriculum approach to reading?**
   100 percent used a combination of curriculum approaches.

3. **Reading ability groups?**
   100 percent **did** use reading groups.

4. **Primary focus on writing skills?**
   100 percent used other: writing in response to reading.

5. **Writing ability groups?**
   100 percent **did not** use writing teams based on writing ability.

6. **Who ultimately decides your curriculum?**
   100 percent stated it was a combination of their choice and the district's choice.

7. **Meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement?**
   100 percent stated that they **were not meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.

- When asked to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

  100 percent of these teachers stated that they felt **no one program was enough to achieve high literacy achievement results**, but Read 180 was a good supplement.

Even though the return of my survey data from this school was below what I expected, I did receive a small amount of surveys that supported the exact same responses among those who responded. There also seems to be a lot of consistency in both the teaching methods and the approaches to reading and writing strategies. I interviewed an administrator from this high school who spoke very candidly with me regarding my interest in this high school and my project. The responses from this individual aligned with those from the teachers who responded to my survey. However, the administrator could not honestly explain why there is such a drop in reading proficiency among the students who receive Free and Reduced Lunch services. The

administrator also acknowledged the concern about this group of students, but also wanted to highlight the fact that this high school had made AYP in previous test years in all cell groups. The administrator said that "there was a strong curriculum in place and felt that the teachers in this school, and the district overall, were top-notch professionals doing a great service to their students, and was certain that the entire staff would pull together to improve this group's achievement potential."

High School #003 (Reference Table 4)

This high school is considered "urban" and did not make AYP in 2006, or in 2007. This high school has a more culturally diverse population than high school #001 and #002 in its reported Asian, Black and LEP/ELL populations, and has a low enrollment of Special Education students. However, this school has a higher percentage of students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch services. According to the data, this school is **not making AYP** in its population of Special Education students in reading ***participation***, and is **not making AYP** in their population of Black or Free and Reduced Priced Lunch students in reading ***proficiency***.

From the data I received from teachers in this school, 100 percent (6) reported that they were familiar with **only** Daily Oral Language, Read Naturally and Read 180. In response to the second page of my survey the following data was collected:

Responses from High School #003

1. **Primary teaching method?**
   50 percent of the teachers used direct instruction.
   50 percent used mixed teaching methods.

2. **Primary curriculum approach to reading?**
   100 percent used a combination of curriculum approaches.

3. **Reading ability groups?**
   100 percent **did** use reading groups.

4. **Primary focus on writing skills?**
   50 percent used essay writing for higher skill level students.
   50 percent used sentence structure and grammar.
   50 percent used sentence structure, grammar, and paragraph development with lower level classes.

5. **Writing ability groups?**
   50 percent **did not** use writing teams based on writing ability.
   50 percent **did** use writing teams.

6. **Who ultimately decides your curriculum?**
   50 percent stated the district decided their curriculum.
   50 percent stated it was a combination of their choice and the district's choice.

7. **Meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement?**
   100 percent stated that they **were not meeting grade level standards** with their lower skill level students.
   50 percent stated they **were meeting grade level standards** with higher level students.

- When asked to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

  50 percent of these teachers stated that they felt **no one program was enough to achieve high literacy achievement results**, but Read 180 was a good supplement especially for lower skill level students.

  In summary, this high school seems to be struggling in several areas that affect AYP.

Like high school #002, the return of my survey data from this school was less than I expected, and also like high school #002, the small amount of surveys I did receive supported very similar responses among those who responded. One clear trend I immediately noticed was a mixed focus on writing skill development. However, it should be noted that a writing component is not part of the current high school standardized test. At the same time, there does seem to be some consistency in both the teaching methods and the approaches to reading and writing strategies in this school. I spoke extensively with one of the three reading specialists in this high school who told me she had also responded to my survey.

She shared her concerns about the students from the three cell groups of students who are not making AYP. She stated that "[her] first concern was in the participation category among black students." Her concern is based on the fact that students who are registered in her high school on October 1st are often no longer enrolled on test day, or choose not to come to school to take the test on test day. She candidly related that she honestly did not know how to effectively approach this issue in order to improve the results.

Her other areas of concern were in the proficiency scores among black and free and reduced priced lunch students. Her experience as an educator is extensive and she made clear her feelings about these students. She stated that "there is growing immigrant population from African countries who are poor and generally uneducated in their home countries." She emphasized the fact that she and her staff "try very hard to work with individual students one-on-one as much as possible, but there is a serious lack of resources. The lack of resources include: an adequate staff of qualified teachers and the budget to hire them, proper skill building programs and communication among staff personnel and family members."

She assured me that she, her staff and her administration were working diligently to address all of their concerns, but that she felt "it [would] take a great deal of time and additional resources to turn the trend around." In the future, she would like to see an increase in qualified staff who is trained and more educated in a variety of reading and writing programs. She has read the data on Read 180 and would like to use it in ways that are more aligned with the design of the program. Unfortunately, she says that the staff is frustrated because of the time restraints in their current daily schedule and because of this they feel they are not positively affecting their struggling students' achievement levels.

High School #004 (Reference Table 4)

This high school is considered "urban" and did not make AYP in 2006, or in 2007. This high school is very similar to the population in high school #003; it also has a high population of Asian, Black, LEP/ELL and Special Education students. This school district also has the highest percentage of students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch services of all the district schools I surveyed. According to the data, this school is **not making AYP** in its population of Black students in reading ***participation***, but is making **AYP** in all cell groups in reading ***proficiency***.

From the data I received from teachers in this school, 100 percent (11) reported that they were familiar with all of the literacy building programs **except** PhonoSpell Techniques. In response to the second page of my survey the following data were collected:

Responses from High School #004

1. **Primary teaching method?**
   64 percent used direct instruction.
   45 percent of the teachers used a student centered approach.
   18 percent used cooperative learning.
   18 percent used classroom discussion
   >1 percent used mixed teaching methods.
   >1 used all four.

2. **Primary curriculum approach to reading?**
   55 percent used whole language as the primary curricula approach to reading.
   36 percent used a combination of curriculum approaches.
   >1 percent used phonics only.

3. **Reading ability groups?**
   73 percent **did not** use reading groups.
   27 percent **did** use reading groups

4. **Primary focus on writing skills?**
   73 percent used paragraph development.
   36 percent used sentence structure and grammar.
   18 percent used essay writing.
   >1 percent used other.

5. **Writing ability groups?**
   82 percent **did not** use writing teams based on writing ability.
   18 percent **did** use writing teams.

6. **Who ultimately decides your curriculum?**
   73 percent stated it was a combination of their choice and the district's choice.
   27 percent stated the district decided their curriculum.
   >1 percent stated that they used only their curriculum.

7. **Meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement?**
   55 percent stated that they **were meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.
   45 percent stated that they **were not meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.

- When asked to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

  45 percent of these teachers stated that they felt Read 180 was the best program.
  36 percent stated that Kansas Strategies was the best program.
  18 percent stated that Daily Oral Language was the best program.
  18 percent stated that Read Naturally was the best program.
  27 percent stated that **other** programs worked best (Language Network, Nancy Atwell and Rosetta Stone).

In summary, this high school seems to be doing very well in most areas that affect AYP. I received more feedback from this high school than all the other schools I surveyed. This high school has the most variation in primary teaching methods, in writing skill development and in the use of literacy achievement building programs. Again, it should be noted that a writing component is not part of the current high school standardized test, but there seems to be a positive relationship between writing and reading results on the standardized test in this school. I spoke extensively to a very well respected and extremely qualified reading specialist who holds multiple degrees and licenses in English education.

She spoke of her concerns about the students from the cell group of students who are not making AYP. She shared the same concerns as the teacher from school #003 in the participation

category among black students. She has also noticed "a trend that students who are registered in school on October 1st are often no longer enrolled on test day, or choose not to come to school on test day." She is a bit more outspoken about the effect this trend has on a school's AYP status. She does not believe that "a school can or should be responsible for making sure students arrive on test day." She explained that it is very difficult to impress on a student's family the importance of these tests when the family itself does not believe they are important. She believes "this is more of a cultural issue than an educational issue, and [does not] know how a federal agency can enforce consequences that happen beyond the doors of a school building." In all honesty, she does not know how teachers can effectively improve a student's family's decision to take a test in order to improve AYP results.

This high school also has a large population of immigrant students from African countries who are poor and generally uneducated in their home countries. She assured me that "she and [her] staff are highly trained, but spend a lot of time determining student skill levels." Her concern is very similar to the teacher at school #003 when it comes to adequate resources, but added that "the skill range of [her] students varies from total illiteracy to about an 8th grade level, which is the current target range before these students can register for general English classes." She also noted that "the students who are now under the new MCA-II test standards have to perform at a much higher proficiency level than students under the old BST test standards." She emphasized that "a skill assessment screening process needs to be put in place at the time of a student's registration, so teaching staff can begin working immediately with students on appropriate skill building." She believes this is a teacher's highest priority.

High School #005 (Reference Table 4)

This high school is considered "urban" and did not make AYP in 2006, or in 2007. This high school is very similar to the population in high school #003 and #004; it also has a high population of Asian, Black, and Special Education students, but not a recordable cell size for LEP/ELL students. This school district also has a high percentage of students who receive Free & Reduced Price Lunch services, but fewer than school district #004. According to the data, this school **is making AYP** in its reading ***participation***, but is **not making AYP** with its Special Education students in reading ***proficiency***.

From the data I received from teachers in this school, 100 percent (3) reported that they were familiar with **only** Daily Oral Language, Kansas Strategies, and Read 180. In response to the second page of my survey the following data was collected:

Responses from High School #005

1. **Primary teaching method?**
   33 percent of the teachers used a student centered approach.
   33 percent used direct instruction.
   33 percent used cooperative learning.

2. **Primary curriculum approach to reading?**
   66 percent used whole language as the primary curriculum approach to reading.
   33 percent used another approach (reading aloud).

3. **Reading ability groups?**
   33 percent **did not** use reading groups.
   66 percent **did** use reading groups.

4. **Primary focus on writing skills?**
   100 percent used essay writing.

5. **Writing ability groups?**
   66 percent **did** use writing teams based on writing ability.
   33 percent **did not** use writing teams based on writing ability.

6. **Who ultimately decides your curriculum?**
   66 percent stated it was a combination of their choice and the district's choice.

33 percent stated they use only their curriculum.

7. **Meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement?**
   66 percent stated that they **were meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.
   33 percent stated that they **were not meeting grade level standards** in literacy achievement with their current curriculum.

- When asked to indicate which programs they felt achieved the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

  66 percent of these teachers stated that they felt Read 180 was the best program.

In summary, this high school also seems to be doing a lot of things right. I received an adequate return of my survey data from this school and was surprised that the responses were so similar among those who responded, considering that this is a fairly large high school. There is a lot of consistency among some seemingly very specific groups in all of the areas I surveyed. Apparently, there are very specific groups of teachers whose teaching methods are very defined: a student centered approach, a direct instruction approach, and a cooperative learning approach. Likewise, it seems groups of teachers either teach using reading or writing groups based on the ability of students, or they do not. I am curious to know whether or not these stratified groups are designed to scaffold skill level among the students as they increase their proficiency. I tried to contact someone specifically from the Special Education Department, but I was not able to make contact with anyone from this high school for an interview. However, I think it may be safe to assume that the majority of the special education students in this school may not have the ability to perform well on either the standardized or a modified test, if it was made available to them. This is the only cell group of students at this school who are not making AYP.

The implications of this research are vast, yet there are findings that are not all that surprising to the educators who enter these schools and classrooms everyday. Across the State, it

has become increasingly clear that the cell groups of students not making AYP continue to fall into the same groups of students: Black, Special Education, and students whose families have low SES and have to receive Free & Reduced Price Lunch services. As the research data shows, these are the common groups of students who are the target of concern among all of the district schools studied in this research project.

It is important to look at the patterns occurring throughout these schools to see whether or not certain curricula approaches can or do positively affect high student achievement scores from state and federal standardized test results at the secondary level. To begin, it is helpful to look at the high school that is making AYP as perhaps a "model" by which to compare the patterns of the other high schools surveyed in this research project.

High School #001 is not as diverse as the other schools surveyed except for their population of Special Education and its low percentage of Free and Reduced Price Lunch students, yet even those students are meeting the AYP criteria in this high school. As the data shows, the teachers and educators in this school are familiar with and using almost all of the available literacy building programs available to them. However, none of these teachers feels there is one program strong enough, on its own, to positively affect student literacy achievement results. This response seems credible because of this schools ability to meet its literacy achievement goals, seemingly by its solid, cohesive foundation among the teaching staff.

High School #002 is more culturally diverse than High School #001 in its population of Black students and has approximately the same low percentage of Special Education and students who receive Free and Reduced Price Lunch, yet **all student groups are making AYP** in reading ***participation***, and are also making AYP in reading ***proficiency*****, except** the students who receive **Free and Reduced Price Lunch**. As the data shows, all of these teachers are

familiar only with four literacy building programs: Daily Oral Language, Ed Helper, Read Naturally and Read 180. Again, none of these teachers feels there is one program strong enough, on its own, to positively affect student literacy achievement results, but they all feel that **Read 180** is an excellent supplement. **Read 180** is a program designed to work with struggling students with low proficiency skills. It may be advisable for this school to use this program for more than an enhancement tool for this group of students.

High School #003 is one of the most culturally diverse schools in this research. It has a higher population of Asian, Black, LEP/ELL and Free and Reduced Price Lunch students, but has a lower population of Special Education students. All student groups **are making AYP** in ***participation*** **except** the **Special Education** students. In reading ***proficiency***, **Blacks** and students receiving **Free and Reduced Price Lunch** are **not making AYP** progress. As the data shows, all of the teachers are familiar with and using only Daily Oral Language, Read Naturally, and Read 180. However, in this school, only half of the teachers feel that no one program is enough to achieve high literacy achievement results, but those same teachers feel that **Read 180** is the best supplement, especially for lower skill level students. Again, this program is designed to be effective under very specific guidelines. This school may need to consider using this program more than a supplemental tool.

High School #004 is very culturally diverse. It has a large population of Asian, Black, LEP/ELL, Special Education, and Free and Reduced Price Lunch students. This school is **not making AYP** in their population of **Black** students in reading ***participation***, but **is making AYP** in **all** groups in reading ***proficiency***. While this school is listed as not making AYP, currently it is affecting only the number of Black students who were either not enrolled on October 1st and/or did not participate on test day. All of the teachers from this school are familiar with and using all

of the available literacy building programs, but did not use or know of PhonoSpell Techniques.

In this school, slightly less than half of the teachers who responded (45 percent) stated that **Read 180** was the best program available for students to achieve increased literacy results, at the secondary level. Slightly more than one-third (36 percent) felt that the Kansas strategies was the best program. One-fifth of two teacher groups use Daily Oral Language and the other uses Read Naturally. Nearly one-third states that there are other programs that work best for them. This school has multiple programs available to them and they do seem to be positively affecting the literacy skill development among their students. Though, as I learned from my interview with this school's reading specialist, it is difficult to use the **Read 180** program in schools without block scheduling, and it does seem worth the effort to build its proper use into a student's school day.

High School #005 is highly culturally diverse. It has a large population of Asian, Black, Special Education and Free and Reduced Price Lunch students. However, it does not have a cell group large enough to report LEP/ELL students. This high school **is making AYP in all cell groups** in ***participation***, but **is not making AYP** with their population of Special Education students in reading ***proficiency***. These teachers reported having knowledge and use of only Daily Oral Language, Kansas Strategies, and **Read 180**.

Only two-thirds of the teachers from this high school responded to the question that asked which programs they feel achieve the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level, and all of them feel that **Read 180** is the best program. It is uncertain whether or not this school uses this program as it was designed. Nevertheless, this school is making AYP among all cell groups except among its Special Education students.

In conclusion, it is important to try to explain the patterns or commonalities these schools share, or to explain the dissociation among these schools, if it exists.

Participation: these schools are making AYP in participation with the exception of two schools, and their groups differ: one did not meet the requirement with Special Education students, and one did not meet the requirement for Black students.

Proficiency: two of these schools are making AYP in proficiency, but three are not. Two are not making AYP in proficiency with their Special Education Students, and one is not making AYP in proficiency with their Black students. It seems apparent that two student cell groups keep recurring in areas that are not conducive to making AYP. Clearly, schools need to focus on the very unique needs of Black and Special Education students. Program implementation, on the surface, seems inadequate. There must be a new emphasis in finding out what sets these students so drastically apart from their peers.

Summary: In relation to the data from my survey:

Question #1: What are teachers' primary teaching methods?

Although the response is somewhat varied, the majority of teachers are using mixed methods, and there does not seem to be a clear indication of the best approach in reaching AYP goals in proficiency with any one method.

Question #2: What are teachers' primary curriculum approaches to reading?

Overwhelmingly, the preferred approach is a combination of whole language and phonics-based reading curricula.

Question #3: Do teachers use reading groups based on reading ability?

Almost exactly half of the teachers surveyed use reading groups, and the other half does not. Surprisingly, the schools that **do not** use reading groups have

better AYP results in reading proficiency. There is research that argues that students in mixed reading ability groups benefit from each other. In these kinds of cooperative learning groups, the higher achieving students act like "mentors" for the lower achieving students, and the result is almost always positive for both groups. The lower achieving students do better, seeming because students are "speaking the same language," and the higher achieving students enrich and enhance their critical thinking and learning abilities.

Question #4: What are teachers' primary focuses on writing skills?

Although the response is somewhat varied, it is interesting that the schools that are using paragraph and essay focused writing are performing better on AYP proficiency. Writing in response to reading, sentence structure, and grammar focuses do not seem to be improving the proficiency of Special Education, Black, or Free and Reduced Price Lunch students, however.

Question #5: Do teachers use writing teams based on writing ability?

Three out of the five schools surveyed do not use writing groups, and two of those schools are making AYP in proficiency. Although, it must be stated again that there is not a writing proficiency standard for AYP, there does seem to be a link between AYP status and schools that do more writing in general. I do not believe that research data bears out that a teacher should use writing groups, but that there should be a strong writing curriculum in each classroom, especially among the low achieving groups that are negatively affecting AYP results.

Question #6: Who ultimately decides on curriculum choices?

Overwhelmingly, most teachers are choosing to use a combination of district and personal standards in developing their curriculum.

Question #7: Do teachers feel they are meeting grade level literacy achievement standards with their current curriculum?

Quite obviously, the school that is making AYP feels that they are meeting grade level expectations. Yet, it is interesting that only half of the teachers in one school that is making AYP in proficiency feel that they are meeting grade level expectations. Not surprisingly, the schools not making AYP do not feel they are meeting grade level expectations, especially with lower ability skill level students.

Finally, in regard to what literacy building program(s) teachers feel achieve the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level, the answer was overwhelmingly **Read 180**. It is the only literacy building program in the literature review; therefore, it is bolded throughout the findings section.

Implications and Conclusion

One question remains: What does all this mean? It means that teachers are doing all they can to respond to literacy achievement using the best practices they know. For generations, educators and their students, have had high stakes testing to measure if students are gaining competency skills in their content areas. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has just raised the bar. Teachers will continue to do what they have been doing for decades, if not centuries, or even millennia.

From my data analysis, there was an overwhelming acknowledgement that no one program would be successful in meeting the needs of all students. However, there was an

obvious indication that the *Read 180* program was by far the most preferred among participants who responded. It is clear from my research that all of the schools I surveyed had been given the funding to implement the *Read 180* program into their curricula. Those who I spoke with about this program agreed, that given the proper training and time allotment in the school day, the *Read 180* program had the most potential for raising low achieving students' standardized test scores. However, it should be re-stated that when I analyzed my data, in terms of schools meeting NCLB ***proficiency*** goals, there is a mix of literacy building programs in place. In fact, the majority of the schools that are making AYP in ***proficiency*** are not using any one program exclusively. Again, the emerging overall theme seems to be that when students are offered a large selection of curricula programs, along with qualified teachers who incorporate multiple ways of effective teaching techniques into their classrooms; successful literacy achievement goals are met.

This research project was successful in how it decoded NCLB and the State of Minnesota's Adequate Yearly Progress goals under this enactment of legislation. This research project was also successful in decoding a handful of Minnesota high school's curricula approach, but it must be acknowledged that there are limitations in this endeavor. For example, the number of schools in this study is too few to make any conclusive statement about the best curriculum approach a district, school or what kind of curricula an educator should implement into his or her classroom. Perhaps a future Ph.D. candidate's study and dissertation can offer the principles of this kind of study more justice in the future. In the meantime, until the federal government steps forward with a proven, federally mandated curriculum for all schools across the nation to follow, that promises to meet the criteria they have challenged educators to achieve, with the adequate funding needed to reach 100 percent proficiency among *all* students by 2014, there can be no realistic chance that our current education system will reach this goal for all students.

As future studies examine successful literacy programs in secondary schools, the following policy considerations are offered for future research: 1) Eliminate The No Child Left Behind Act. It embraces a seriously flawed standardized test structure with erroneous outcome goals. According to the data, there are large subgroups of students who are still falling dangerously behind regardless of the new testing mandate. It can easily be determined by looking at the data that students need more classroom instruction on the basics of how literacy foundations function, than an increase in testing. With that being said, standardized tests, for as long as they have been in existence, have continued to provide teachers with helpful data to target low level literacy skills among students, and this will continue to be a helpful tool, but will not be a permanent fix to low test scores. 2) Pay the long over-due Special Education funding bill. For decades, Special Education has been seriously under funded by the federal government since the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Yet, in 2004, the federal government provided local school districts with "just under 20 percent of its commitment rather than the 40 percent specified by the law, creating a $10.6 billion shortfall for states and local school districts. This shortfall creates a burden on local communities and denies full opportunity to all students -- with and without disabilities" (NEA, 2008). As school districts continue to fund special education out of their own pockets, the ramifications are far reaching. With fewer available funds for all students, it creates large gaps for program funding in other areas. 3) Properly acknowledge who our students are in the public school system, and provide resource funding that will enable teachers to communicate with and teach highly illiterate students from all over the world. In my high school, we have students who represent 45 countries. As many professionals told me, we simply do not have the resources available to accommodate all of the special needs of these non-identified "special education" students. 4)

Address the real cultural barriers that are still plaguing our communities. We need to have leaders from all ethnic groups step up and educate their cultures about the importance of education. Teachers can only do so much once students are in our classrooms; we have little impact on their cultural belief systems. I have had many opportunities to talk with parents and family members about my concerns; there are times when those struggling students finally hear the message that education is important and get the support they need from home. On the other hand, there are many times when I cannot reach a family member, or when I do, there is a sense of apathy on the part of the adults that give the impression that the student is on his or her own when it comes to school. The data clearly shows that are a huge ethnic populations who are not reaching literacy achievement goals, and they and their families need educational program support as well, unfortunately, the funding for such programming is extremely limited. 5) Establish a national literacy achievement platform that requires students to do well in their high school course work. I do not propose that we eliminate the standardized test system altogether, because it does have value in determining skill acquisition and academic progress. However, a high stakes test cannot be the only determining factor on how well a particular student is acquiring knowledge. We can see by the data that test scores, on a national level, are not improving at the rate conceived by the enactment of NCLB. Rather, there needs to be an emphasis on the importance on what happens in the classroom. My literature review, as well as countless other studies supports the effectiveness of low teacher-student ratios in the classroom. Educators need to spend quality time with individual students to make sure they get the basic foundations they need to pass courses and standardized tests.

Self-Reflection

As I contemplate my refection on the final completion of this Action Research Project, a number of things occur to me. One is that large endeavors such as this study does not come to fruition when one necessarily wants them to and two, when the time is right, completion comes when it is supposed to happen. I began my journey to becoming a high school English teacher ten years ago, at the age of 35. I was determined to have my Master's degree finished long before now; however, as an adult, I have learned that life often takes its own course. I have raised an intelligent, successful daughter on my own who is now in her first year of college. I have a loving mother and brother whose lives, at times, have crossed over mine and made my life change direction in subtle ways. I have also overcome many personal obstacles that have made it difficult to focus on my completion of this project. Nevertheless, in time, these weavings and obstacles from my path eventually cleared, and I was able to find a job as an English teacher in a district and in a high school that I love.

In the three years that I have been a teacher in that school, many new opportunities found their way into my life. I have since become the 11th grade AP English Language and Composition teacher, was the Future Educator's Club advisor for a year, have participated on the Staff Development Committee, received a technology grant for my classroom, and this year became the School Newspaper advisor, and most relevant to this research project, a member of our building's Site Improvement Plan Committee. The participation in this last committee has been the single most important link for the timely completion of this research project. It seems that the timing for truly understanding the meaning of my research and completing it was meant to be now.

Like many schools around the State of Minnesota, our high school is not making Adequate Yearly Progress in all of the areas we would like, but we have, and we will continue to make, progress. As a part of my school's Site Improvement Plan's Committee, I worked on a four member to improve the reading skills of all students in our school. I would like to share what our plans are to emphasize that we, like the majority of all schools, are doing all we can to improve student achievement. I hope others can learn or be inspired in their own way to improve the lives of the students with whom they are involved.

Our school had 22 action steps that had to be addressed. I will condense them here for ease of understanding.

For all teachers in our school the Site Improvement Plan call is to:

- Incorporate reading strategies into their content to help students interact with text and improve comprehension.
- Each trimester, review class lists of students that show the reading levels of the remedial students. This information will be helpful for teachers to understand the specific needs of each struggling reader's specific needs.

For all students, this plan calls for them to:

- Use their reading strategies across the curriculum.
- Use their 100 minutes of bi-weekly mediation time wisely.
- Read the books that the Reading is Fundamental (RIF) program has granted our school.

For English and reading teachers and their students, we want to ensure proper placement of students in the appropriate class at the beginning of each trimester, so we will:

- Screen newly enrolled students with the NWEA reading test.

- Refine the processes for placement of incoming remedial 10th grade students, and track remedial 11th and 12th graders.

To meet the needs of ELL students, the plan includes:

- Offering five levels of reading classes.
- Continuing implementation of *Read 180* and *Rosetta Stone*.
- Implementing a plan for refusal of ELL services with the goal to keep students in the classes where they can be successful with their limited reading skills.

For Special Education students, the plan includes:

- Reading classes with BST and MCA-II preparation.

Other students who are reading two years or more below grade level will:

- Enhance their skills in the English/Reading class for required English credit and the Reading Lab for elective credit.

All 10th grade regular English students will:

- Practice their skills tested by the MCA-II which teachers are imbedding into the district curriculum.

All 11th grade English students will:

- Practice the reading and English parts of the ACT practice tests. There will also be review sessions and students will be encouraged to take the ACT test preparation classes offered by Community Education.

This plan's goal is to continue to make progress in our students' academic achievements. With or without a legislative body mandating that schools improve students' skills in the areas of reading, science and math, educators have done this and will continue to set hither goals for their students; it's what ethical, responsible, professional and dedicated teachers do. I think there is a

significant drop in teacher moral since the enactment of NCLB. I know that a lot of excellent, highly qualified teachers feel insulted for being "punished" for high stakes testing criteria beyond their control. However, there is always a sense of acceptance and hope among teachers who know we can always do better, and we will continue to meet the demands required of us as professional educators. Being a part of my countries educational system makes me proud, and like the majority of my colleagues, we wake up everyday to new challenges and embrace them with enthusiasm. Since I have become a teacher, I have eagerly anticipated getting up everyday to be with students who I consider my "surrogate children." I have the deepest admiration and fondness for all of my students, especially when they allow me to be a small part of their lives. I continue to look forward to being an active educator who will continue to participate in whatever I need to do to improve the education and hopefully the lives of my students for many years to come. I continue to love looking at the proud faces of my students who have had the courage to take on the challenges I give them and see them cheer for their successes, that culminates in handing them their diplomas at the end of auspicious journey.

Appendix A

May 14, 2007

Dear colleague,

My name is Kathleen Kinney; I am a high school English teacher in a northwest suburban Minneapolis school district. As a full-time teacher, I know how valuable your time is, so, I'll be brief.

It is my desire to complete my Master's degree in Education at Augsburg College by researching and reporting on the curricula that secondary English and secondary ELL teachers from successful schools are using. I want to learn which curricula are currently being used or adopted, and which approaches are affecting literacy achievement results. By studying trends in schools with high test scores, I hope to see the relationship between teachers' approaches to literacy and achievement.

I am asking you to read the attached consent form and, if you wish, participate by replying to my survey. The survey is anonymous, and all of your responses will remain confidential, but a code will be used to determine school derivation so I can conduct further interviews with literacy coordinators, if necessary. After my thesis is finalized and published, the research data will be destroyed. I want to emphasize that anyone who wishes to participate and provide information on this research will be kept secure, and that involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. By responding to this survey, it will be understood that those who are choosing to participate in this survey are giving their consent.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kinney

Appendix B

Please fill out the survey/questionnaire and return in the postage-paid envelope.

Please check the boxes of the literacy building programs with which you are **familiar**:

_____ AGS Basic Grammar
_____ Daily Oral Language (Evan-Moor Corp.)
_____ Ed Helper
_____ Kansas Strategies Sentence Writing
_____ PhonoSpell Techniques
_____ Program Phonics
_____ Read Naturally
_____ Read 180

Please check the boxes of the literacy building programs you have used in the **past five years**:

_____ AGS Basic Grammar
_____ Daily Oral Language (Evan-Moor Corp.)
_____ Ed Helper
_____ Kansas Strategies Sentence Writing
_____ PhonoSpell Techniques
_____ Program Phonics
_____ Read Naturally
_____ Read 180

Please indicate what grade level you have taught using these programs:

_____5-7 _____ 8-9 _____10-12

Please list any programs you have used in the **past five years** that are not listed here:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Please indicate what grade level you have taught using these programs:

_____5-7 _____ 8-9 _____10-12

Please indicate which programs you feel achieve the best literacy achievement results at the secondary level:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

1. What do you consider your **primary teaching method**?
_____ direct instruction _____ student centered approach
_____cooperative learning _____ problem based _____ classroom discussion
_____ other

If other, please indicate _____

2. What do you consider your **primary curricula approach to reading** at the secondary level?
_____ phonics-based _____ whole language _____ combination _____ other

If other, please indicate _____

3. Do you use reading groups based on **reading ability**? _____ yes _____ no

4. What is your **primary focus on writing skills**?
_____ sentence structure and grammar _____ paragraph development
_____ essay writing
_____ other, please indicate_____

5. Do you use writing teams or groups based on **writing ability**? _____ yes _____ no

6. Who ultimately decides your curriculum?
_____ you _____ district _____ combination _____ other

If other, please elaborate _____

7. Do you feel that your students are meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement with your current curriculum?
_____ yes _____no

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- What have been the most effective literacy building programs with which you are familiar?
- What are some of the various literacy building programs you have used?
- What grade levels have you taught literacy skill building?
- What age group responds the most positively to these programs?
- What age group responds the least positively to these programs?
- Can you articulate any particular indicator from these programs that seems the most effective in achieving grade level literacy skills?
- What programs, if any, have the best literacy achievement potential at the secondary level?
- What teaching methods work best in literacy achievement skill building at the secondary level?
- What reading methods work best in literacy achievement skill building at the secondary level?
- Other than state or federal tests, how do you accurately assess secondary grade level reading ability?
- What is your classroom approach to improving secondary grade level reading ability?
- What is the primary focus on how to improve writing skills at the secondary level?
- Who ultimately decides your curriculum?
- Do you feel that your students are meeting grade level standards in literacy achievement with your current curriculum?
- What additions, improvements, modifications, or omissions would you like to make in your department's literacy curriculum objectives and outcome strategies?

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